



Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

1 July–31 December 2021



Programme of the Slovenian Presidency of the Council of the European Union

1 July–31 December 2021

Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| THE PRIORITIES OF THE SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION | 1 |
| INTRODUCTION | 2 |
| PRIORITIES | 3 |
| 1. THE RESILIENCE, RECOVERY AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION | 4 |
| Resilience | 4 |
| Strategic autonomy | 5 |
| Recovery | 6 |
| 2. CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE | 10 |
| 3. A UNION OF THE EUROPEAN WAY OF LIFE, THE RULE OF LAW AND EQUAL CRITERIA FOR ALL | 12 |
| 4. A CREDIBLE AND SECURE EUROPEAN UNION, CAPABLE OF ENSURING SECURITY AND STABILITY IN ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD | 15 |
| THE SIX-MONTH PROGRAMME OF THE SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION BY COUNCIL CONFIGURATION | 18 |
| GENERAL AFFAIRS | 19 |
| Cohesion policy | 20 |
| ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS | 21 |
| JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS | 22 |
| Home affairs | 22 |
| Justice | 23 |
| ENVIRONMENT | 24 |
| TRANSPORT, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND ENERGY | 25 |
| Telecommunications | 25 |
| Energy | 25 |
| Transport | 26 |

| | |
|--|----|
| COMPETITIVENESS | 28 |
| Internal market and industry | 28 |
| Research and space | 29 |
| HEALTH, EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS | 31 |
| Health | 31 |
| Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities | 31 |
| AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES | 33 |
| EDUCATION, YOUTH, CULTURE AND SPORT | 35 |
| Education | 35 |
| Youth | 35 |
| Culture | 35 |
| Sport | 36 |
| EXTERNAL RELATIONS | 37 |
| Foreign affairs | 37 |
| Defence | 38 |
| Foreign trade | 38 |
| Development and humanitarian aid | 39 |

**THE PRIORITIES
OF THE SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY
OF THE COUNCIL
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION**

INTRODUCTION

The European Union is the central economic, legal and political framework for cooperation for most European countries. It provides a framework and mechanisms for overcoming common challenges which are either too great for individual countries to tackle successfully on their own, or to which finding solutions together is more cost-effective and/or safer. The EU as an institution has been able to gradually build the existing mechanisms of cooperation because it brings together countries and nations that are part of the same European civilisation. That is why the EU is first and foremost an institutionalised process that upholds values, civilisation and peace, and then, building on this foundation, an economic, political and (partly) monetary union. It is an ongoing process, with a goal that has yet to be attained – that of a Europe that is fully united, free and at peace with itself.

The benefits of the European integration process should not be taken for granted. The changed situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic has presented the EU with new challenges. On the one hand, the situation has revealed our lack of preparedness for this threat, but on the other, it has highlighted the ways in which we can fight epidemics together in a timely and effective manner in future. It has become clearer than ever that the EU's existence and further development depend above all on its ability to be true to the values on which it was founded and to respond in a timely and effective way to threats and problems affecting all member states, and, to that end, to develop or improve the means needed to respond to such situations.



si2021.eu

Skupaj. Odporna. Evropa.
Together. Resilient. Europe.

PRIORITIES

This is the second time Slovenia will hold the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Slovenia will round off the work of the current Trio, which also includes Germany and Portugal, and, with its initiatives and activities, will pave the way for the next Trio to take over. Most of the discussions related to the Conference on the Future of Europe will take place during the Slovenian Presidency. Slovenia's priorities for the second half of 2021, which falls within the New Strategic Agenda 2019-2024, contribute to securing the European Union's existence and development.

1. **The resilience and recovery of the European Union.**
A strategically autonomous European Union.

Developing and enhancing plans and mechanisms to reinforce the European Union's resilience in the face of pandemics and large-scale cyberattacks. Recovery of the European Union from the pandemic that is based on a digital, green and fair transition.

2. **The Conference on the Future of Europe.**

Organising discussions open to everyone who would like to contribute suggestions on how to build a common European future.

3. **A union of the European way of life, the rule of law and the same criteria for all.**

A union of balanced rights and responsibilities, a high level of protection for human rights and fundamental freedoms, including the right to freedom of expression.

4. **A credible and secure European Union. A union that is capable of ensuring security and stability in its neighbourhood.**

A union of cooperation within the North Atlantic Alliance. A Union that actively seeks to achieve the strategic objective of a Europe that is fully united, free, and at peace internally and with other continents. A Union of protected external borders with clear differentiation between legal and illegal migration.

1. THE RESILIENCE, RECOVERY AND STRATEGIC AUTONOMY OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

Resilience

The fundamental priority of Slovenia as the member state holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU will be to **contribute to building a stronger and more resilient European Union**. To that end, we will focus on improving **the EU's ability to anticipate and deal effectively with different crisis situations** which, due to their nature or their extent, exceed the capacity of individual member states to manage them, or which have a considerable cross-border impact. In the course of its Presidency, Slovenia will focus on **strengthening capacities to successfully deal with pandemics** and different forms of modern and complex security risks and threats, such as **large-scale cyberattacks**. Our efforts will be directed towards **reducing dependence on external players**.

We will undertake a comprehensive **review of the lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis**, as part of which we will take a strategic look towards the future. The review will also focus on the cross-border impact of measures implemented to prevent the spread of the virus in a number of key areas of the EU's activity, such as the internal market, with the aim of reducing the negative effects of such measures and preserving the integrity of the internal market by means of a coordinated approach. We will focus on **strengthening the capacity, sustainability and resilience of healthcare systems** and other critical infrastructure of the EU and the member states, and on establishing **a high level of self-sufficiency by ensuring the supply and management of stocks of key goods and services**. To improve preparedness for pandemics and strengthen the resilience of healthcare systems, work on a *European Health Union* will be of particular importance, which will include reinforcing the tasks of *the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)* and *the European Medicines Agency* with the aim of providing high-quality scientific data to serve as the basis for decision-making by the member states

in the event of pandemics. At the same time, we want to make progress on the legal framework for cooperation between member states in the face of serious cross-border health threats, including **the preparation of pandemic preparedness plans and coordination mechanisms**. In July, Slovenia will organise a high-level conference to achieve the objectives it has set by introducing solutions for resilient healthcare systems.

In the course of its Presidency, Slovenia will focus on strengthening capacities to successfully deal with pandemics and different forms of modern and complex security risks and threats, such as large-scale cyberattacks.

A further important task of the Slovenian Presidency will be **strengthening resilience and ensuring an effective response to major cyberattacks** and crises, including greater integration of the cybersecurity aspect in a comprehensive crisis response. The focus will be on strengthening the cyber resilience of critical infrastructure and the digital single market. We aim to make decisive progress in considering the proposal for a *Directive on measures for a high common level of cybersecurity across the Union* and the *Directive on the resilience of critical entities*. Because of the EU's high level of exposure in the event of cyber threats to its immediate neighbourhood, Slovenia will support cybersecurity capacity building in Western Balkan countries. On the margins of the Bled Strategic Forum, which is to take place at the beginning of September, we will organise a high-level conference on cybersecurity to which representatives of the Western Balkan countries will also be invited.

Slovenia will also work to further **strengthen and improve the effectiveness of the EU's response to large-scale natural and other disasters**. We will support further development of the *European civil protection pool and rescEU capacities*, as well as increasing efficiency of operations, including transport and logistics capacities.

A further important task of the Slovenian Presidency will be strengthening resilience and ensuring an effective response to major cyberattacks and crises, including greater integration of the cybersecurity aspect in a comprehensive crisis response.

Strategic autonomy

The COVID-19 crisis clearly shows that the EU's resilience cannot be ensured without addressing the issue of the European Union's dependency on certain key goods. For this reason, the Slovenian Presidency wants to intensify the debate on **ensuring the autonomy of the European Union in certain strategic areas, such as the supply of medicines, vaccines and medical equipment**, and in the area of **industrial policy and energy**, as well with regard to **food supply**.

Slovenia will devote special attention to the implementation of the renewed *industrial strategy*, which also includes the aspect of strengthening the EU's strategic autonomy and **technological sovereignty**. The Slovenian Presidency will launch a debate on measures to protect the internal market and strategic investments, as well as resources and technologies, with a view to **strengthening the sustainability of European value chains**. The Presidency will also work towards ensuring that **European companies, including small and medium-sized enterprises, have better access to global integrated value and supply chains**. We will strive for an open trade policy, strengthening alli-

ances and cooperation with trading partners around the world, while enhancing approaches to efficiently address unfair commercial practices. We will intensify the debate on space traffic management with a view to ensuring the security and autonomy of the European space industry. **Reinforcing the EU's independence in the area of vaccines and key medicines** will be a particularly important part of ensuring strategic autonomy. To that end, the Slovenian Presidency will begin working towards the establishment of the *European Health Emergency Preparedness and Response Authority* (HERA). Our objective is for HERA to have its own research and development capacities as well as adequate infrastructure at the European level to enable the production of medicines and vaccines.

For this reason, the Slovenian Presidency wants to intensify the debate on ensuring the autonomy of the European Union in certain strategic areas, such as the supply of medicines, vaccines and medical equipment, and in the area of industrial policy and energy, as well with regard to food supply.

In the context of the debate about increasing resilience and independence, one of the important objectives of the Slovenian Presidency will be **making European infrastructure more resilient**. To ensure the smooth running of services that are key to maintaining essential social and economic functions, we will devote particular attention to considering *the Directive on the resilience of critical entities*. With the objective of improving integration and enhancing the security of supply in the single energy market and European energy infrastructure, we will prioritise consideration of *the Trans-European Energy Networks Regulation* (TEN-E); this is in line with *the European Green Deal* and the EU's long-term decarbonisation targets, and contributes to sectoral and market integration, security of supply and competition.

The COVID-19 emergency has reminded us of the **strategic importance of food supply** in the EU. One of the objectives of the Slovenian Presidency will be to make a shift towards treating agriculture as a critical and strategic sector that must provide secure, adequate, sustainable and resilient food supply in accordance with the strategic guidelines set out in *the Farm to Fork Strategy*. That is why, as part of the fundamental priority to build a stronger and more resilient EU, food supply will be included in the efforts to **improve the EU's crisis management system**. The strategic role of agriculture, improved exchange of information, and coordinated action to ensure the security of food supply in times of crisis, will be the themes of the debate on the *European Commission's communication on the contingency plan to ensure food supply and food security*, which will be moderated by the Slovenian Presidency.

Recovery

One of the EU's central tasks in the near future will be the recovery of the European economy based on the **green transition and the digital transformation, taking account of demographic challenges**. One objective of the Slovenian Presidency is to stimulate investment in the dual transition, including through the provision of substantial funding under *the Multiannual Financial Framework*, in particular via the *Resilience and Recovery Facility*, to specific programmes and projects that will help member states to overcome these challenges, restart the economy and achieve societal recovery. The Slovenian Presidency is making every effort to ensure that procedures for approving *national recovery and resilience plans* are completed as soon as possible.

The Slovenian Presidency will initiate debate on **proposals for new own resources**. Their main purpose will be to relieve the burden on member states' budgets and create fiscal space so that national budget resources can be directed towards economic recovery. We will devote particular attention to the *proposal for digital taxation* and a *new own resource based on a carbon border adjustment mechanism*. With the aim of ensuring a fast and sustainable recovery, the Slovenian Presiden-

cy will promote debate on **the implementation of EU fiscal rules** in a way that will ensure a **balance between effective support for economic growth and long-term fiscal stability**. To improve preparedness for future challenges, Slovenia will focus on strengthening the long-term stability and efficiency of the financial system, which must be **relieved of the risks** arising from the consequences of the pandemic **in a sustainable manner**.

One of the EU's central tasks in the near future will be the recovery of the European economy based on the green transition and the digital transformation, taking account of demographic challenges.

The Slovenian Presidency will do its utmost to ensure that **the EU maintains its leading role in the field of the just green transition at global level**. The climate change objective is clear and ambitious: to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 compared to the base year of 1990, thus reducing harmful emissions and energy dependence, and ensuring a just energy transition, while maintaining or improving the competitiveness of European industry. With this ambitious objective in mind, Slovenia as the member state holding the Presidency of the Council of the EU will start negotiations on *the 'Fit for 55' legislative package*. We will conduct the negotiations in such a way that individual solutions are turned into legislation **in accordance with the principles of solidarity, fairness and cost-effectiveness, and respecting member states' right to choose their energy mix and technologies, which also includes the possibility of exploiting the potential of safe nuclear energy**. In this context, *the revision of the greenhouse gas emissions trading system* will be of particular importance, as well as work on *legislative proposals pertaining to renewable energy resources, emissions from transport, land use and forestry*.

The transport sector is a significant source of greenhouse gas emissions. For this reason, the Slovenian Presidency will prioritise devoting attention to **sustainable and smart mobility**, focusing on the *adaptation of the TEN-T network* and **the development and widespread use of alternative fuels**. In this context, Slovenia attaches central importance to promoting **e-mobility** through the use of energy from low-emission sources, an adequate charging infrastructure and availability of vehicles. **Wider use of rail transport** offers further possibilities for reducing emissions. 2021 is the *European Year of Rail*, and the Slovenian Presidency will take this opportunity to promote discussions and prepare plans for necessary changes to infrastructure. **In the area of finance**, work on *the European Green Bond Standard* will also contribute to the achievement of climate targets.

The climate change objective is clear and ambitious: to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 55% by 2030 compared to the base year of 1990, thus reducing harmful emissions and energy dependence, and ensuring a just energy transition, while maintaining or improving the competitiveness of European industry.

In its role as the member state holding the Council Presidency, Slovenia will actively contribute to further **strengthening the role of the EU in combating climate change at global level**. The Slovenian Presidency will prepare and coordinate the EU's ambitious negotiating mandate for the *26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26 UNFCCC)* in Glasgow.

The green transition will depend on the implementation of a **circular economy**. Slovenia's goal is not only to reduce environmental risks, but also to **use green technologies to safeguard EU compa-**

nies' competitive advantage internationally and to reduce the EU's dependency on key raw materials. For this reason, in terms of legislation, we will focus on continuing to pursue negotiations on the renewed legislative framework for batteries and on addressing the issue of waste shipments. The *legislative act on batteries* will ensure better battery performance across their life cycle while addressing the challenges posed by increased battery use. The revision of the *Waste Shipment Regulation*, which reduces waste exports from the EU and facilitates the movement of waste for recycling within the EU, will contribute to more efficient waste management and better use of secondary raw materials.

With regard to agriculture, the Slovenian Presidency will support sustainable solutions that will **meaningfully integrate agriculture into natural resource management systems** and will take into account concerns about conservation of rural areas, including the **development of links between agriculture and tourism**. Slovenia is planning a political debate on **the preparation of strategic plans for the implementation of the common agricultural policy**. The Slovenian Presidency will actively participate in the *'Farm to Fork' conference*, which is to take place in October on *World Food Day*. On the basis of the renewed *post-2020 EU Forest Strategy*, Slovenia will intensify the debate on integrated forest management, emphasising the importance of sustainable forest management.

The Slovenian Presidency will place strong **emphasis on the debate about different aspects of digitalisation**. We will support development that gives the EU **greater digital autonomy** and enables it to **close the gap more quickly behind those who have taken the global lead**. This includes **improving connectivity, developing a secure, effective and resilient digital infrastructure – including the 5G network, improving digital skills and access to digital public services, and establishing a favourable environment for developing, testing and using new technologies**, as well as the timely preparation of *legislative bases for the development and use of artificial intelligence*. The issues of artificial intelligence and data will be of paramount importance in implementing the objectives of digital

transformation and autonomy under the Slovenian Presidency. The Slovenian Presidency will focus on making progress in negotiations on the *Artificial Intelligence Act*, which will provide the general framework for further regulation in this field, formally define artificial intelligence, and limit the risks posed by its wider use. In the areas of re-use, processing and exchange of data and the data economy, the Slovenian Presidency will continue consideration of the *Data Governance Act* and launch deliberations on the *Data Act*. In September, the Slovenian Presidency will organise a high-level conference on artificial intelligence, where it will highlight the challenges of developing effective policies and regulation to promote the development and use of artificial intelligence in society, ensure public confidence in artificial intelligence, and plan joint activities as part of a coordinated plan for the development and use of artificial intelligence at EU level.

The Slovenian Presidency will place strong emphasis on the debate about different aspects of digitalisation. We will support development that gives the EU greater digital autonomy and enables it to close the gap more quickly behind those who have taken the global lead.

Competitiveness and deepening the single market, while respecting its **social dimension**, will be strategic objectives for the Slovenian Presidency. Key to these objectives will be the **removal of cross-border barriers to services** and the free movement of goods and persons, and addressing imbalances between supply and demand in labour markets. The Slovenian Presidency will focus on improved implementation and enforcement of single market rules and on carefully monitoring the implementation of individual measures. We will also focus on **the issue of standardisation** and the establishment of a crisis mechanism for the internal

market that will enable us to deal with future crises more easily. In this way, we want to contribute to a more resilient internal market with an emphasis on the development of its digital and green dimensions. The digital and green transition will be one of the strategies that guides us in *adapting consumer protection rules* and *updating state aid rules*.

As the member state holding the Council Presidency, Slovenia will focus on **the development of the digital internal market**. We will conduct negotiations on important legislative proposals concerning regulation of digital services. The objective is to update competition rules in digital markets and to strengthen consumer protection. Slovenia's task will be to bring member states' views into closer alignment on the proposals for the *Digital Services Act* and the *Digital Markets Act*, which introduce ambitious reforms of the digital space and a comprehensive set of new rules for all digital services, including the regulation of online platforms, and competition in digital markets. On financial services, we will coordinate *legislative proposals on digital finance*. These proposals will bring about **regulation of the crypto-assets market** and strengthen the **digital operational resilience of the financial sector**.

Competitiveness and deepening the single market, while respecting its social dimension, will be strategic objectives for the Slovenian Presidency.

In addition to a focus on green and digital aspects, which are fundamental elements in the recovery of the European economy, the focus will also extend to some of the industries that have been most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The Slovenian Presidency will focus on the recovery of certain industrial ecosystems, devoting particular attention to **the recovery of the tourism industry**, particularly with a view to improving its resilience in the event of future crises. The Slovenian Presidency will promote debate on the challenges and possibilities of a cli-

mate-neutral, safe and smart tourism industry in the new age, which must adjust structurally to the new reality in order to achieve long-term competitiveness and sustainable growth. Slovenia will launch a debate on this topic at the *informal meeting of EU tourism ministers to be held on 16 November 2021* and at the *traditional European Tourism Forum 2021*, which Slovenia is organising in cooperation with the European Commission and is to take place on 17 November 2021 in Brdo.

The Slovenian Presidency will also highlight **the role of science and research in achieving the goals of successful economic recovery and of an effective green and digital transition**. This will be facilitated by enhancement of the *European Research Area (ERA)* development model. The Slovenian Presidency will make efforts to develop a new framework for ERA governance. By promoting new approaches, such as **missions** within the *Horizon Europe* programme and the **New European Bauhaus** movement, it will focus on how **to better direct investments** towards solving interdisciplinary and global challenges, such as cancer, marine pollution and poor quality of city life. Special attention will be devoted to research infrastructure, the professional integration of young researchers, synergies between research and education, and research ethics. It is planned that the Council of the EU will adopt the *Pact for Research and Innovation*, while the new governance framework will strengthen the implementation of common goals, at both EU and national level, through the ERA Forum for Transition. In October, a high-level conference will be held in Ljubljana on the role of research and innovation in the EU and on the tasks of the *European Research Executive Agency* in this context. Before this event takes place, Slovenia will organise a conference entitled *Space for Green and Digital Recovery* in collaboration with the *European Space Agency*.

Slovenia will highlight **the need to address demographic issues**, which is an essential element of recovery and one of the most important strategic challenges the EU is facing. Our goal is **to develop high-quality policies that will contribute to reversing negative demographic trends**. The Slovenian Presidency will focus on improving the

situation for families and young people, while promoting activities that ensure equal opportunities for all, regardless of gender. The Presidency will work on measures to apply labour market incentives that have a positive impact on family life. Slovenia is planning a high-level conference in October on the provision of quality work through **changes in the balance between professional and family life, lifelong acquisition of skills and knowledge, and ensuring a safe and healthy workplace, including in the professions of the future** and new forms of work. Discussion will focus on a quality work environment, taking into account increasing digitalisation, automation and robotisation in the world of work.

The Slovenian Presidency will also highlight the role of science and research in achieving the goals of successful economic recovery and of an effective green and digital transition.

An important element in countering negative demographic trends will be designing policies to help limit adverse consequences for the economy and for development. The key measures will be directed towards **providing a responsive and inclusive labour market**, encouraging workers to stay in the labour market as long as possible, and **adapting the social protection systems**. The basis for further measures will be the *action plan for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights*, which still serves as the fundamental guideline for managing the current social and economic challenges in the EU. We will devote particular attention to different aspects of demographic trends in the labour market and to **the active participation of the elderly in society** in accordance with the *Green Paper on Ageing*. The Slovenian Presidency will also work on measures to provide quality work at all stages of life.

2. CONFERENCE ON THE FUTURE OF EUROPE

A **broad public debate** is taking place within the Conference on the Future of Europe about the main challenges Europe will have to address in the future. The main purpose of the debate is **to bring European issues closer to citizens** and to find out about their views on the main issues of our common future. The implementation of this unique democratic project falls within the **responsibility** of the European Parliament, the European Commission and **the Council of the EU, which will be led by Slovenia during the major part of the Conference.**

In its role as the country holding the Presidency, **Slovenia will coordinate and represent the positions of the member states in chairing the Conference.** The goal of the Slovenian Presidency is to co-organise **two plenary sessions and several European Citizens' Panels**, in which young people will also participate, to allow a broad debate on the open issues of European policy and on the solutions that are needed. We will ensure that the ideas and proposals formulated will be adequately represented and presented at **the Conference Plenary**, which will also be held during the Slovenian Presidency. Slovenia will place great emphasis on transparency of the conference and will **regularly inform the Council of the EU** about its work. We will make every effort to ensure that the work of the conference progresses as planned, with the aim of concluding it in the spring of 2022 during the French Presidency.

During its Presidency, Slovenia will also ensure that due attention is paid to the fundamental questions of the debate on the future of Europe throughout the EU. We want to help ensure that **differing legitimate opinions** are heard in the development of common views on solutions for the future. We believe that **only an honest discussion based on historical experience** will lead to the strengthening of the EU, in which our values of constitutional democracy, as well as the European identity and our individual national identities, will be protected and continue to thrive. Our goal is to **strengthen the common understanding** that there are some

challenges that the member states can only tackle together at EU level, while there are other issues that are easier for countries to tackle on their own, and they therefore need the necessary autonomy within the EU framework. For this purpose, we will organise **a series of events** with a high level of international participation aimed at **a broad and inclusive debate on the main issues of the future development of the EU.**

A broad public debate is taking place within the Conference on the Future of Europe about the main challenges Europe will have to address in the future. The main purpose of the debate is to bring European issues closer to citizens and to find out about their views on the main issues of our common future.

At the beginning of September we will hold the 16th Bled Strategic Forum under the title The Future of Europe. Its aim is an in-depth consideration of issues, risks and opportunities vis-à-vis our common future. We will invite the **most prominent current European leaders** to speak at this key event about the main strategic challenges that Europe is facing. We will also encourage reflection on issues relating to the past and to the future development of European values, which form the basis of mutual cooperation and allow an understanding of our common challenges. We will provide a space for intellectual debate, and suggest ideas for possible improvements to the current institutional arrangements and the operation of the EU. We will also listen to the input of young people, as they are the ones who will build and live in the Europe of the future.

At the beginning of September we will hold the 16th Bled Strategic Forum under the title The Future of Europe. Its aim is an in-depth consideration of issues, risks and opportunities vis-à-vis our common future.

When debating the future of Europe we must also listen to those who have gained the most experience in this field if we want to take advantage of opportunities missed in the past. We will therefore be organising **a panel discussion among the most prominent former European leaders** who have significantly influenced the development of European policies, during which they will have the opportunity to talk openly about opportunities that the EU has not yet been able or known how to seize.

3. A UNION OF THE EUROPEAN WAY OF LIFE, THE RULE OF LAW AND EQUAL CRITERIA FOR ALL

The Slovenian Presidency will emphasise the need **to raise awareness of the European way of life**, which cannot simply be taken for granted and is based on respect for personal dignity, freedom and fundamental rights, as well as respect for rules and the fulfilment of obligations. This is what enables the EU to achieve sound economic and general social development, a high level of social protection, and **high-quality inclusive education**. In this context, too, Slovenia will draw attention to the need to counter negative **demographic trends** in the EU, which represent Europe's greatest long-term strategic vulnerability, also in terms of development. We will start the process of reversing negative trends with high-quality policies on recovery and the internal market.

The Slovenian Presidency will also devote its attention to equal **respect for the fundamental values and principles of the EU**, including the rule of law, which is the joint responsibility of the EU institutions and the member states. The democratically elected institutions and their representatives bear the primary responsibility for this. Media plurality, the social partners and other sections of civil society play an important monitoring role. However, their responsibility and powers are not greater than, or even equal to, the responsibility and powers invested in elected authority as a result of its democratic legitimacy.

The Slovenian Presidency will emphasise the need to raise awareness of the European way of life, which cannot simply be taken for granted and is based on respect for personal dignity, freedom and fundamental rights, as well as respect for rules and the fulfilment of obligations.

Respecting the rule of law based on the principle that the equal criteria apply to everyone is also vital to maintain citizens' trust in public institutions and a **prerequisite for mutual trust among member states**. It is also critically important to the smooth **operation of the internal market**, where laws and other regulations must be developed and applied impartially, uniformly and effectively, and budget expenditure must comply with the applicable rules.

The Slovenian Presidency will also devote its attention to equal respect for the fundamental values and principles of the EU, including the rule of law, which is the joint responsibility of the EU institutions and the member states.

Within the framework of the comprehensive *rule of law monitoring mechanism*, Slovenia will focus on the consideration of and an exchange of opinions on **the second annual report on the rule of law situation across the EU**, as well as continuation of the **debate on the situation in member states**. Through a constructive dialogue and on the basis of the annual reports, Slovenia will endeavour to ensure a better understanding of different constitutional solutions adopted by the member states in response to similar challenges. The dialogue within the rule of law monitoring mechanism must unite member states in a **community of European values**. The mechanism must operate objectively and transparently, while respecting the equality of member states, as well as their national identities, which are inherent in their fundamental political and constitutional structures. We will devote special attention to **the freedom and plurality of the media** and **the fight against fake news**, which is imperative in

any environment dominated by a media monopoly. **The proper functioning of the judicial system** is equally important, and this must be based on an independent, impartial and objective judiciary that, in every member state, strives for justice and ensures legal protection without delay and avoiding unreasonably drawn-out time periods.

The dialogue within the rule of law monitoring mechanism must unite member states in a community of European values. The mechanism must operate objectively and transparently, while respecting the equality of member states, as well as their national identities, which are inherent in their fundamental political and constitutional structures.

The Slovenian Presidency draws attention to *Resolution 1096 (1996) of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe* and the *European Parliament resolution of 2 April 2009 on European conscience and totalitarianism*. These guidelines and warnings are of lasting importance for the development of resilient, vibrant democracies, in particular for the achievement of the historical goal of a Europe fully united, free and at peace. Certain guidelines and warnings from the resolutions have not yet been achieved in some of the younger democracies, although they have been EU member states for some time. Therefore, we cannot yet say that hearts and minds were actually transformed during the transition to democracy. We consider this to be one of the deeper reasons for mutual misunderstandings regarding the rule of law in individual EU member states. **Many are unwilling or unable to see cases where the standards and guarantees of the rule of law do not really protect the European values** set out in Article 2 of the *Treaty on European Union*; **on the contrary**, the rule of law institutions that only formally assumed new roles, but

have not internalised them, use these standards and guarantees to protect unjustified privileges and preserve the culture of operation established during the decades of undemocratic arrangements and practices, which shrink the space of freedom and maintain deeply-rooted inequalities and injustices. These issues will also be discussed at the international conference to be held in Slovenia on the occasion of the *European day of remembrance for victims of totalitarian regimes* on 23 August 2021. It is our shared responsibility and ongoing task to preserve the memory that awareness of the need for European integration was formed in the course of the difficult and undemocratic historical ordeals of the 20th century that marked the nations of today's EU member states, albeit each in its own way and for varying lengths of time.

It is our shared responsibility and ongoing task to preserve the memory that awareness of the need for European integration was formed in the course of the difficult and undemocratic historical ordeals of the 20th century that marked the nations of today's EU member states, albeit each in its own way and for varying lengths of time.

The Slovenian Presidency believes that a **good understanding of the constitutional, socio-economic, political, historical and all other similarities and differences between the member states can contribute to strengthening the rule of law in the EU**. Therefore, consideration of particular aspects of the rule of law merits a professional comparative legal approach that is as in-depth as possible. Progress in the shared understanding of the rule of law can only be achieved if we depoliticise the debate as much as possible and ensure an **equal and contextual treatment of different constitutional systems and practices**. We are convinced that

the establishment of a **European foundation for constitutional democracy** would contribute to this. The foundation would include an institute to bring together experts from all EU member states, who would provide the European Commission and the member states with autonomous and independent analyses of specific issues concerning the rule of law, which EU institutions and member states could, if necessary, rely on in various procedures. Slovenia is willing to host the head office of such a foundation and provide the basic infrastructure for its operation.

The European foundation for constitutional democracy would also fill the gap in **the monitoring of compliance with the rule of law by EU institutions, whose operation must also not be beyond external control**. In this regard, Slovenia will also strive for the Council of the EU to make progress towards *the accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights*.

4. A CREDIBLE AND SECURE EUROPEAN UNION, CAPABLE OF ENSURING SECURITY AND STABILITY IN ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD

Along with the leading role of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the Slovenian Presidency will contribute to an effective **promotion of the EU's interests and values in the world**. With regard to strategic issues, we will highlight the importance of **forging and strengthening strategic alliances** with the countries we are connected to through common societal roots, in particular with the countries of the transatlantic alliance, Israel and the democratic Indo-Pacific countries.

Slovenia's goal is to ensure effective implementation of the Schengen legislation and the full functioning of a stronger, more robust Schengen area without internal border controls, that is equipped for the challenges ahead. For this we need, in addition to conquering the pandemic, a more effective approach to dealing with illegal migration at its source, more effective protection of the external EU border, a functioning asylum system, a more consistent policy of returning persons who have not been granted international protection to their countries of origin, and close cooperation both with countries of origin of migration and with transit countries.

During its Presidency, Slovenia will also put the issue of **strengthening EU security** at the heart of its efforts, since security is a prerequisite for a successful future and for prosperity. To this end, we will promote the development of measures for better and more assertive internal and external security of the EU. The **Schengen regime of no internal border controls** is extremely important in this context, in spite of the fact that, in recent years, it has not been possible to implement it in full everywhere due to illegal migration and the COVID-19 pandemic. Slovenia's goal is to ensure effective implementation of the *Schengen legislation* and the full functioning of a stronger, more robust Schengen area without internal border controls, that is equipped for the challenges ahead. For this we need, **in addition to conquering the pandemic, a more effective approach to dealing with illegal migration at its source, more effective protection of the external EU border, a functioning asylum system, a more consistent policy of returning persons who have not been granted international protection to their countries of origin, and close cooperation both with countries of origin of migration and with transit countries**. These will be Slovenia's goals in the negotiations and coordination for adoption of the legislative and other acts under the *Pact on Migration and Asylum*, which is the key framework for more effective management of migration pressures. We will work towards further **harmonisation of member states' asylum systems** and actively engage in seeking a political consensus for the **implementation of the concepts of responsibility and solidarity**. Slovenia's task will be to ensure a horizontal and comprehensive approach in discussing and adopting measures and policies in all Council configurations. Special attention will be devoted to resolving **the problem of illegal migration routes to the EU**. We will lead negotiations with a view to formulating clear rules that will allow EU institutions and member states **to implement procedures more effectively, including the**

procedures for returning persons who have not been granted international protection, and to resolve financial burdens and legal issues more easily, in accordance with the fundamental principles of human rights protection. We will also promote **better police cooperation and exchange of information in the fight against human trafficking and other forms of organised cross-border crime.** To this end, we will organise a meeting of home affairs ministers in Brdo in November, and a meeting of home affairs ministers of the Western Balkan countries in December.

In the **fight against terrorism and various forms of religious or ideological radicalisation,** Slovenia will strive for cooperation with all like-minded countries, as this is the only way to curb and prevent terrorist acts. The EU should strengthen its cooperation with humanist Islam and countries that practise it.

We also aim to **strengthen EU cooperation in the field of security and defence, and in the countering of cyber and hybrid threats.** In this context, the EU needs measures of common foreign and security policy aimed at identifying and **fighting hybrid threats more effectively.** We must cooperate better in dealing with **fake news** and **disinformation** that comes from outside the EU, the political, economic or other objectives of which are to undermine the effectiveness and operation of EU institutions and member states. We must pre-empt such fake news and disinformation with **strategic communication.**

In order for the EU to be able to ensure security in a reliable way, it must provide a greater degree of strategic autonomy in the field of defence. This is true both for the defence capabilities of each member state and for joint defence capabilities. Therefore, with regard to the EU's external action, the Slovenian Presidency will support **the strengthening of the common foreign and security policy (CFSP), the common security and defence policy (CSDP) and transatlantic relations.** Close cooperation with the United States and NATO based on common principles, values and interests is the best guarantee for strengthening the position of the

EU in the international community and for facilitating the pursuit of common interests by the member states. We will promote awareness that cooperation with the United States as a key strategic ally is essential for the success of the EU's activities in the European neighbourhood, as well as in issues of global importance, such as addressing climate change or fighting the cyber and hybrid threats that the EU and other allies are confronted with.

In the context of external action, Slovenia will devote special attention to the **Western Balkans.** To this end, it will organise **the EU-Western Balkans summit** in Brdo in October. During its presidency, Slovenia will make every effort to ensure continuation of the enlargement process with the Western Balkan countries in accordance with the revised enlargement methodology. Enlargement is one of the fundamental levers for reform processes in the Western Balkan countries. We will support **progress in the resolution of open security and political issues** in the region, such as the Belgrade-Pristina dialogue. It is also our ambition **to include the region's partner countries in the initiatives of the common security and defence policy.**

In order for the EU to be able to ensure security in a reliable way, it must provide a greater degree of strategic autonomy in the field of defence.

In order to implement the *global strategy for the foreign and security policy of the EU*, the Slovenian Presidency will actively participate in the development of the *Strategic Compass*. Our goal is to establish improved connections between the strategic and operative levels, particularly in response to external crises, to enhance partners' capacity building and to ensure the security of the EU and its citizens. Slovenia will give particular support to **strengthening relations between the EU and NATO** on military mobility, cybersecurity, hybrid threats and interoperability. To this end, we will support **the institutionalisation of contacts between the two organisations.**

In the context of external action, Slovenia will devote special attention to the Western Balkans. To this end, it will organise the EU-Western Balkans summit in Brdo in October.

In addition to the Western Balkans, Slovenia will also promote a comprehensive debate on the **European neighbourhood policy**, with regard to both the southern and the eastern dimensions. We will promote the implementation of the EU's *new Agenda for the Mediterranean*, discussion of which is

planned for the December European Council, and the setting of priority objectives for cooperation with the Eastern partners, which will be the central topic of **the EU-Eastern Partnership summit** to be held in Brussels in October.

In terms of global changes, Slovenia will actively participate in debates on the *EU's Indo-Pacific strategy* and the strengthening of structural political and economic cooperation between the EU and this region.

Together with the European External Action Service and the European Commission, Slovenia will actively contribute to the organisation of all other **third-country summits** to be held during the Slovenian Presidency.

**THE SIX-MONTH PROGRAMME OF
THE SLOVENIAN PRESIDENCY
OF THE COUNCIL
OF THE EUROPEAN UNION
BY COUNCIL CONFIGURATION**

GENERAL AFFAIRS

The second half of 2021 will be affected by the continuation of certain measures against COVID-19. The Slovenian Presidency will therefore attach great importance to efforts to ensure a rapid, effective and coordinated EU response in the fight against COVID-19. In addition to topical issues such as vaccines, rules for crossing internal borders and travel, the Slovenian Presidency would like to focus on more strategic aspects of the response, including the experience gained by the EU during the COVID-19 crisis.

The Slovenian Presidency will seek synergies in relation to the use of various mechanisms to strengthen **respect for the rule of law**. When conducting the annual rule of law dialogue, the Presidency will, in a constructive spirit, follow the principles of objectivity, impartiality and equal treatment of all Member States, aiming to contribute to a convergence of views and improve mutual understanding and trust between Member States and the EU institutions. Taking into account these principles when conducting the rule of law dialogue, the Slovenian Presidency will seek an appropriate balance between the two parts of the dialogue and conduct discussions within the General Affairs Council in an equitable manner, giving due weight to the interests and expectations of all stakeholders.

On the basis of the joint declaration adopted in March, the Slovenian Presidency, in cooperation with the incoming French and Czech Presidencies, will work together with the European Parliament and the European Commission to steer the debate with citizens, national parliaments and other stakeholders **in the context of the Conference on the Future of Europe**. The results of the conference will form the basis of a report with proposals for the further development of the European Union, which is expected to be prepared in spring 2022 and discussed by the European Council. The report will provide input for the preparation of the next EU Strategic Agenda. Within the conference, the Slovenian Presidency will be responsible for representing the Council's positions, providing information to

Member States and, in cooperation with representatives of the European Parliament and the European Commission, ensuring the smooth functioning of the executive board and the plenary of the conference.

The Slovenian Presidency will place particular emphasis on continuing the **enlargement and stabilisation and association processes** with the Western Balkans partners, with an emphasis on adopting the negotiating frameworks for the Republic of North Macedonia and the Republic of Albania. The Slovenian Presidency will also focus on continuing the negotiation process with Montenegro and the Republic of Serbia. We will pursue the adoption of Council conclusions with a positive message regarding the prospect of membership of the European Union. In the autumn, the Slovenian Presidency will launch the confirmation process to formally adopt the Instrument for Pre-accession Assistance (IPA III).

Particular attention will be paid to the strategic aspects of **EU-UK relations**. Activities will mainly relate to the implementation of the Withdrawal Agreement, the Agreement on Trade and Cooperation and the Agreement concerning Security Procedures for Exchanging and Protecting Classified Information, and the Slovenian Presidency will endeavour to ensure a partnership with the United Kingdom in the interest of all 27 Member States.

With regard to the implementation of the **European Democracy Action Plan**, it is expected that during the Slovenian Presidency the revision of the Regulation governing European political parties will start and other legislative proposals, which will contribute to the protection of electoral integrity and encouraging democratic participation will be launched. The objective is to adopt the legislation before the elections to the European Parliament in 2024. The Slovenian Presidency will continue activities related to strengthening media pluralism and media freedom and combating disinformation.

In the context of **legislative programming**, the Presidency will strive to facilitate a smooth delib-

eration and decision-making process regarding the Commission's work programme for 2022. This process is to be finalised in December 2021 with a joint declaration by the Commission, the European Parliament and the Council on the EU's legislative priorities.

As regards **hybrid threats**, the Presidency will review the current challenges faced by the Western Balkans in this area. Particular emphasis will be placed on deepening EU-NATO cooperation, as hybrid threats are one of the key complementary and horizontal themes for cooperation. In the area of countering hybrid threats, the Slovenian Presidency will continue work on the hybrid risk survey (HRS2) and activities related to the Strategic Compass and the European Democracy Action Plan from the perspective of countering disinformation and taking into account the lessons learned from COVID-19.

With regard to improving cyber-crisis response, priority will be given to establishing an EU-wide Joint Cyber Unit and conducting training activities and exercises. We will endeavour to adopt Council conclusions on cyber-crisis response.

Long-term strategic planning will be discussed by ministers and secretaries of state for European affairs (or the 'ministers for the future' designated by Member States) as part of the process of drawing up the European Commission's Strategic Foresight Report for 2021, its central theme being the EU's open strategic autonomy. The report will focus on key areas where the EU can strengthen its role as a global actor by 2040 and on areas where Europe needs to increase its resilience and reduce its dependency by 2040. The Slovenian Presidency will endeavour to provide regular updates to Member States regarding the process of drawing up the report, which will be led by the Commission.

Cohesion policy

The new financial framework for cohesion policy for the period 2021-2027 represents an important contribution to the long-term strengthening of the EU's resilience and to bridging the development gaps between different areas and regions. Together with other mechanisms aimed at recovery and resilience, cohesion policy will also contribute significantly to achieving a green transition, digital transformation and sustainable growth.

After adopting the legislative framework for cohesion policy, the Slovenian Presidency will focus on exchanging views and experience with a view to preparing strategic and programming documents for the next programming period. Based on the experience of individual Member States in implementing cohesion policy during the 2014-2020 programming period, particular attention will be devoted to an exchange of views on an effective management and implementation system for the 2021-2027 programming period. The focus will be on ensuring flexibility and introducing the simplifications that are provided for by the regulatory framework. Cohesion policy also plays an important role when it comes to tackling the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences, so the Slovenian Presidency, together with the European Commission, will continue holding discussions and directing activities to establish a resilient Europe capable of managing and responding more effectively to current and future crisis situations and other challenges, aiming to bridge development gaps between regions.

During the Slovenian Presidency, particular emphasis will be placed on bringing cohesion policy closer to citizens. European funds connect us in various ways, coming from and returning to people with the aim of eliminating development gaps and ensuring a level playing field for all.

ECONOMIC AND FINANCIAL AFFAIRS

Economic and financial affairs will be at the forefront of the Slovenian Presidency, with measures that will help the European Union out of the current crisis and work on the long-term legislative agenda.

The central element of the joint recovery strategy is the **implementation of the Recovery and Resilience Facility**, with the completion of the **process of approving national plans** in the Council and the beginning of **monitoring of implementation** under the Slovenian Presidency. Achieving a successful recovery will also be the aim of the adjusted implementation of the common **fiscal rules**, which will allow for an appropriate balance between measures to support economic growth and the stability of public finances even after the COVID-19 crisis. Particular attention will be paid to the **adoption of the EU budget for 2022**.

With regard to financial services, the Slovenian Presidency will continue activities related to the **Banking Union**. One of the key dossiers in the area of banking will be a legislative proposal to complete the **implementation of the Basel III standards**, which eliminate several shortcomings of the regulatory framework and allow for a flexible banking system that prevents the build-up of systemic vulnerabilities. During the Slovenian Presidency considerable work will be devoted to further **measures for the prevention of money laundering and terrorist financing**, based on the European Commission action plan. Other important activities in the area of financial services will relate to legislative

proposals on **digital finance**, including the regulation of the crypto-assets market, strengthening of the financial sector's digital operational resilience, and the establishment of the **European Green Bond Standard**. As regards **insurance**, the Slovenian Presidency will focus on revising the **Solvency II Directive**, which will guarantee safe and solvent insurance companies. We will also further initiatives to strengthen the Capital Markets Union, with the aim of facilitating access to finance for businesses.

Legislative work in the area of taxation will focus on two dossiers that will provide the basis for new EU own resources, namely the dossiers on **digital taxation** and the **carbon border adjustment mechanism**. Addressing the issue of **taxation of energy products and electricity** will also be of great importance. If the proposal to amend the Directive on Administrative Cooperation (**DAC8**) is presented before the summer, the Slovenian Presidency will endeavour to reach a consensus on that by the end of the year. In the **non-legislative area**, a major challenge will be to update the **list of non-cooperative jurisdictions for tax purposes**. Work on **reforming the mandate of the Code of Conduct Group (Business Taxation)** will also have to be continued and completed.

As regards business relations with third countries, we will further the simplification and integration of customs and other administrative procedures for companies, based on the legislative proposal for a **customs single window**.

JUSTICE AND HOME AFFAIRS

Home affairs

On home affairs, particular attention will be devoted to **further developing a comprehensive system for migration and asylum management in the EU** and continuing negotiations on legislative proposals, as well as strengthening mutually beneficial partnerships with countries of origin, transit and destination, including cooperation on return and readmission and EU field coordination in third countries. One of the priorities is **ensuring a well-functioning Schengen area and strengthening external border protection**, where the focus will be on the Strategy on the future of Schengen and the revision of the core legislative acts (the Regulation on the Schengen Evaluation Mechanism and the Schengen Borders Code), as well as the operationalisation of the Regulation on the European Border and Coast Guard and the implementation of interoperability. The emphasis will be on ensuring **a high level of security in the EU, mainly through improved and enhanced police cooperation**, where the proposal to amend the Europol Regulation will be particularly relevant.

The **Western Balkans** should be mentioned as a geographical priority, in relation to which the aim will be to strengthen cooperation with partners in the region regarding *inter alia* the transposition of

EU standards, provide support for migration management and strengthen police cooperation in the areas of terrorism, environmental crime, prevention and investigation of online child abuse and exploitation, and cross-border tracing of missing children and other missing persons.

The pandemic has revealed the interconnectedness and interdependency of various sectors and services, as well as the need to protect citizens' freedoms. Furthermore, it has highlighted the need for Member States to work together to increase the resilience of critical infrastructure. The Slovenian Presidency will also strive **for increased internal security and the protection of citizens** when discussing the Directive on **the resilience of critical entities**.

Activities related to civil protection will focus on **building resilience to natural and other disasters**, with plans to strengthen the **Union Civil Protection Mechanism** in all phases of disaster management, including improving the response to large-scale disasters, by developing the **EU's civil protection objectives in terms of disaster resilience** and by bringing together various stakeholders and establishing the **Union Civil Protection Knowledge Network**.

Justice

In the area of justice, the Slovenian Presidency will strive to raise awareness of the importance of effectively combating **hate speech** and **hate crimes**, as these constitute acts that violate the principles and values on which the European Union is founded and which are common to all Member States. Particular attention will be paid to effectively combating illegal hate content, which is particularly prevalent **online**. In this context, the Slovenian Presidency will devote attention to the victims of crime and continue activities relating to the rights of victims of crime. The **rights of children** will be put at the forefront; in this regard, the Council will prepare a comprehensive response to the EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child.

The **EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights** will further reinforce the EU's system for the protection of fundamental rights and, for this reason, the Slovenian Presidency will sup-

port all activities aimed at concluding negotiations as quickly as possible. In relation to fundamental rights, the Slovenian Presidency will place particular emphasis on ethical aspects and the possible impacts of **artificial intelligence** tools on fundamental rights.

Progress on the **digitalisation of justice** will also be important. The Slovenian Presidency wishes to launch a discussion on the new legislative proposal on the digitalisation of judicial cooperation in the EU, and will continue work on the proposal for a computerised system for communication in cross-border civil and criminal proceedings (e-CODEX system). Particular attention will be paid to Council negotiations on the EU's accession to the Hague Convention on the Recognition and Enforcement of Foreign Judgments, as well as to the negotiations with the European Parliament on the **e-evidence** legislative package.

ENVIRONMENT

With regard to the environment and climate change, the Slovenian Presidency will strive for the prompt and ambitious implementation of the Green Deal agenda, particularly in the areas of **climate change, biodiversity and the circular economy**. In line with the objectives of the Recovery and Resilience Facility on green investment and environment- and climate-friendly measures, the Green Deal is central to the recovery process.

In relation to **climate change** we will prioritise the revision of climate and energy legislation, i.e. the **'Fit for 55' legislative package**. The package will include a comprehensive set of measures (revision of the EU emissions trading system, a Regulation on effort sharing between Member States, CO₂ emission standards for vehicles, adequate regulation of land use, land-use change and forestry) to achieve the increased EU climate target, i.e. at least a 55 % net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 compared to 1990 levels. This is the path to achieving the long-term objective of making the EU the first climate-neutral continent by 2050 in a balanced manner. The Slovenian Presidency will begin the debate on this package, trying to identify as many outstanding issues as possible and find balanced compromise solutions. In addition to the urgent emission reduction measures in various economic sectors, a relevant legal framework is needed to provide Member States with financial resources for the green transition. At global level, the Slovenian Presidency will coordinate positions and represent the EU's ambitions at the **Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26), which will be held in Glasgow from 31 October to 12 November 2021**. When formulating the man-

date, particular attention will be paid to seeking a consensus that would enable the EU to assume a leading role and present a united front in the negotiations on the achievement of the objectives of the Paris Agreement, thus contributing to global climate neutrality. At COP26, the Slovenian Presidency will work towards finalising the rules framework for the implementation of the Paris Agreement.

As part of building the circular economy, the Slovenian Presidency will seek to reach agreement on a general approach to the **legislative act on batteries**, with which the EU is pursuing a life-cycle approach for products and responding to the challenges of increased battery use. The revision of the **Waste Shipment Regulation** will also help to reduce waste and improve the exploitation of secondary raw materials, namely by reducing the export of waste from the EU and facilitating the shipment of waste for recycling within the EU. The Slovenian Presidency wishes to use the political debate to pave the way for further negotiations in this area.

On biodiversity the Slovenian Presidency will support the process of adopting an ambitious post-2020 global biodiversity framework in preparation for the **Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15), which will be held in Kunming, China**. The aim of the conference is to set new global biodiversity targets and strengthen efforts in this area. Efforts at EU level will be concentrated on reducing biodiversity loss through measures to restore ecosystems and other measures under the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030. Pollinators play a particularly important role in the EU's efforts to conserve biodiversity, which is why the causes of their decline must also be addressed.

TRANSPORT, TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND ENERGY

Telecommunications

Digital transformation, together with the green transition, is one of the two key elements of the EU's economic renewal. The goal of making Europe more environmentally friendly, digital and resilient and cyber secure involves digital transformation management, particularly in the areas of data, technology and infrastructure.

In the area of **digitalisation and artificial intelligence**, the Slovenian Presidency will give priority to proposals relating to **artificial intelligence (AI), data and data economy, and the Roaming Regulation**.

With regard to artificial intelligence, the Slovenian Presidency will try to make as much progress as possible with the **horizontal act on artificial intelligence**, which will provide the general framework for further regulation of artificial intelligence, formally define artificial intelligence and delimit artificial intelligence according to risks.

On the use, processing and exchange of data and data economy, the Slovenian Presidency will continue legislative procedures for the **Data Governance Act**, in respect of which it will strive to reach a general approach or begin negotiations with the European Parliament. It will also begin to consider the **Data Act**.

For European users of cross-border mobile communications services (mobile calls and mobile data), the Slovenian Presidency will strive for maximum progress towards a general approach or begin negotiations with the European Parliament on the **Roaming Regulation**, which is intended to update the current Regulation and extend its validity.

The Slovenian Presidency will continue negotiations with the European Parliament on the politically important **ePrivacy Regulation**.

We will continue deliberations on the **eID Regulation**, which should encourage European citizens

to increase the use of electronic identity and other trust services, aiming to make maximum progress on the issue.

The emphasis in cybersecurity matters will be on improving resilience and cyber-crisis response, while on **cyber resilience**, it will be essential to consider the proposal for a **Directive** on measures for a high level of cybersecurity within the Union (the NIS 2 Directive). We will endeavour to reach a general approach or start negotiations with the European Parliament as quickly as possible.

In parallel, activities will be carried out with regard to implementing the new EU Cybersecurity Strategy, establishing the European Cybersecurity Competence Centre and a network of national centres, ensuring the security of 5G networks, developing European cybersecurity certification schemes and ensuring the security of internet-connected devices.

Work in other areas will include activities under the common foreign and security policy: increasing the cyber resilience of the Western Balkans, strengthening EU-NATO cooperation, cyber diplomacy (UN processes, revising cyber diplomacy tools and responding to malicious cyber activities using diplomacy tools) and cyber defence (revising the EU Cyber Defence Policy Framework and setting up an EU Military CERT Network).

Energy

In the context of achieving higher climate goals, two renewed proposals will be presented in the field of energy: **the Renewable Energy Sources Directive (RES) and the Energy Efficiency Directive (EE)**. The Slovenian Presidency will start negotiations on both acts and, at their conclusion, will prepare progress reports with the aim of reaching an agreement as soon as possible. The Slovenian Presidency will also start discussions on the proposal to update the **Directive on the energy performance of buildings (EPBD)**. The amendments to EPBD will set out new measures and highlight the EU's commitment to modernising the building sector associated

with technological improvements and increasing the renovation of buildings speed.

The Slovenian Presidency will **prioritise making maximum progress in dealing with the Regulation on Trans-European Energy Networks (TEN-E)**. This initiative will ensure that the TEN-E Regulation is fully in line with the European Green Agreement and the EU's long-term decarbonisation targets, while contributing to sectoral and market integration, security of supply and competition.

With a view to integrating renewable energy sources into the gas pipeline network, consideration will be given to the **decarbonisation package in the field of gas legislation**. In the context of the EU's ambitious climate goals, work will also begin on a proposal for **methane legislation** as part of efforts to reduce methane emissions in the energy sector.

Transport

Transport is one of the most important sectors in the EU's sustainable transition under the European Green Deal and at the same time one of the sectors most affected by the COVID-19 crisis. The Slovenian Presidency will therefore continue to focus primarily on the **recovery of the sector** and related experience. The recovery must go hand-in-hand with a transition towards **sustainable and innovative mobility**, whereby the crisis should be seized as an opportunity to take a leap forward in the development of the transport sector. Continuing to ensure a **functioning internal market and the four freedoms** is crucial, especially in a pandemic situation. Priority will be given to proposals that will address the issues of the crisis as well as to transparent cooperation aimed at formulating the Immediate Action Plan.

Given the aim of decarbonisation, an increase in rail freight and passenger transport in the EU is essential. This year has been designated as the **European Year of Rail** in the EU and the Slovenian Presidency will support all activities aimed at promotion of the sector. The establishment of modern national and international railway infrastructure, high-speed rail connections and modern train technology are key to the competitiveness and attractiveness of rail

passenger and freight transport in the EU.

The new Smart and Sustainable Mobility Strategy sets a target of a 90% reduction in transport emissions by 2050. The first technological step on this path is the **development and widespread use of alternative fuels**. This is also the main political priority of the Slovenian Presidency in the field of transport. Slovenia primarily sees the need to promote **e-mobility** with energy from low-emission sources also by providing sufficient charging infrastructure and accessible vehicles. The Slovenian Presidency will therefore strive for progress **in negotiations on the revision of the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Directive (AFID) and new proposals in the field of aviation (Refuel Aviation) and maritime activities (Refuel Maritime)**. Slovenia will work, where possible, to reach a general approach agreement or at least a partial agreement.

Part of the infrastructure package envisaged for November 2021 will be a proposal to recast the **Intelligent Transport Systems (ITS)**, which is essential to ensuring the interoperability of transport, automation and digitalisation of the sector. The Slovenian Presidency will hold discussions at working level and prepare a progress report.

An efficient and functioning EU internal market and links between neighbouring countries are essential for a resilient sector. Slovenia will therefore give priority to the **TEN-T revision proposal**, which aims to complete the EU's core transport network by 2030 as well as modernise and increase the EU competitiveness of road and rail transport. Related to this is the **proposal to revise the railway corridors** where coordination with TEN-T networks is important. Slovenia will aim to identify major open issues and prepare a progress report, thus helping to reach a swift agreement in the coming year. Connectivity with the **Western Balkans** and cooperation with the Transport Community will be one of the main horizontal priorities here.

In order to increase the resilience and flexibility of the aviation sector, the Slovenian Presidency will continue the work on a legislative proposal for the establishment of the **Single European Sky (SES II +)** and will approach the negotiations (start of tri-

logues) with ambition. The regulation of air traffic management capacities is crucial, as it will contribute to a further reduction in the environmental footprint of the aviation sector.

The COVID-19 crisis has shown the need for an adequate **level of protection of passengers rights**. Slovenia will be open to continuing the resumption of negotiations on a **Regulation establishing com-**

mon rules on compensation and assistance to passengers in the event of denied boarding, cancellation or long delay of flights. It will examine further steps in the light of the current situation, which remains worrying due to the impact of the pandemic on the aviation sector. The level of protection for air passenger rights should not be reduced, regardless of the economic situation.

COMPETITIVENESS

Internal market and industry

The Slovenian Presidency will strive to deepen the single market, make progress in the green transition and digital transformation, achieve digital sovereignty, ensure the EU's strategic autonomy, and support small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and start-ups. In addition, it will implement the results of an evaluation of competition rules, and changes and updates to the European competition framework.

The Slovenian Presidency will encourage creativity and connecting companies with creative industries, which are a source of incentives for the development of the economy and society as a whole. The central focus here will be to contribute to the transition to a low-carbon circular economy while strengthening economic growth, competitiveness and the creation of (green) jobs.

As regards the internal market, the focus will be on the Digital Package (**Digital Services Act (DSA)** and the **Digital Markets Act (DMA)**), which will bring about an ambitious reform of the digital space and introduces a comprehensive set of new rules for all digital services. By regulating the operation of online platforms, especially very large ones (VLOPs), the mechanism for removing illegal online content should be significantly improved, which will help to protect fundamental human rights online, including freedom of speech. The DMA addresses the structural problems of competition in digital markets that cannot be solved by existing competition rules, thus ensuring a level playing field and more opportunities for all businesses in EU digital markets and, consequently, more choice for consumers. The Slovenian Presidency will want to make as much progress as possible in dealing with these issues, with the aim of reaching an agreement in the Council.

A major element as regards the internal market will be the **Strategic Report on the Implementation** of the Internal Market Action Plan: here the Slovenian Presidency wishes to pay special attention to

guidelines for further work on better enforcement of internal market rules, and the **crisis mechanism for the internal market**. In the field of technical harmonisation, in line with the prioritising of artificial intelligence, the **revision of the Machinery Directive** will be to the fore. The Slovenian Presidency intends to address this in parallel with the horizontal act on artificial intelligence. In the field of technical harmonisation, attention will also be given to the concept of **common chargers for mobile phones**.

The Slovenian Presidency will strive for as much progress as possible regarding the proposal for **Corporate Sustainable Reporting Directive (CSRD)**, the main goal of which is to improve the reporting of sustainable information of certain large companies and thus target investments at companies striving to address sustainability issues. In the area of company law, work is expected to begin on a legislative proposal related to sustainable corporate governance; this will be an important contribution towards making companies more sustainable development-oriented.

In the field of **intellectual property**, the Slovenian Presidency will strive for progress in negotiations on the recast of the **Directive on the Legal Protection of Databases**, which is taking place simultaneously with the preparation of the Data Governance Act. Some data are protected by intellectual property rights or as a business secret, so a balance must be struck between promoting the sharing of data that require a secure environment and protecting legitimate interests so that sensitive business data are not illegally obtained, used or disclosed.

We will encourage as much progress as possible in implementing the **new consumer agenda**, which aims to empower consumers to play an active role in the green and digital transition. In this context, Slovenia will negotiate a revision of the Consumer Credit Directive, a Directive on consumer empowerment for the green transition as well as a revision of the General Product Safety Directive, which aim to adapt consumer protection to new societal and

technological challenges.

In order to strengthen the EU's competitiveness, it is essential to integrate European industry into the green and digital transition, in particular by introducing sustainable and digitised technologies into production processes. The Slovenian Presidency will continue to discuss the **updated European industrial strategy**, which will respond to these most pressing industry challenges in the EU. The Presidency will focus on the implementation of the strategy, including recovery, dual transition, SMEs, strategic autonomy, and discussions on the state and recovery of some industrial ecosystems.

The revitalisation, recovery and resilience of the **tourism ecosystem**, which has been hit hard by the pandemic, will be a major pillar in the economic recovery of Europe. The Slovenian Presidency will focus on continuing a coordinated sustainable approach to supporting the recovery and revitalisation of the tourism and travel industry and strengthening the sector's resilience against future crises. We will strive to coordinate structural and sectoral measures to restore the tourism ecosystem and to promote the green and digital transition of tourism SMEs and tourist destinations for the necessary adjustments to new and innovative business and management models. We will advocate SME access to a range of financing sources, which is crucial for the survival of companies in times of crisis, the necessary investment in sustainable and digital renovation, growth and development of basic tourism and travel infrastructure and investment in skills. We will pay particular attention to the goals of sustainable, climate-neutral and green tourism in destinations in connection with sustainable transport mobility and decarbonisation in the value chains of the tourist ecosystem. The Slovenian Presidency will also highlight the importance of the coordinated activation of the complementary development potentials of sustainable competitiveness, growth and employment in sub-sectors; this includes things such as harmonious regional and local development, rural development and less developed areas, and the creative sector in culture and creative industries, which are important for the promotion of recognisability and preservation of the European identity

of tourism. We will promote innovative and smart solutions to enable the free movement of people, secure cross-border mobility and the security of tourist services, and restore consumer confidence in tourism activities in the EU's single market. We will continue to work on the preparation of a medium- and long-term EU Tourism Agenda 2030/2050 and strive to make progress towards a common vision and ambition for the future of sustainable EU tourism. Drawing lessons from the COVID crisis, we will take into account the challenges of creating a tourism ecosystem for a new era that is green and climate neutral, more accessible, inclusive, innovative and competitive.

Research and space

The work of the Council Presidency in the field of research falls into four groups: European partnerships, international cooperation, the European Research Area and gender equality in research.

European partnerships (public-private and public-public) are one of the main tools at EU level to promote the green and digital transformation of industry and social subsystems through joint programming of research, development and innovation and the transfer of knowledge and research results between science and industry. The Slovenian Presidency will work to conclude negotiations on a legislative package of three acts covering the establishment of institutionalised partnerships, high-performance computing and metrology.

The EU Framework Programme for Research and Innovation Horizon Europe is a magnet for attracting third countries into the European Research Area. In the context of **international cooperation**, the Slovenian Presidency's approach to research will also emphasise cooperation with Western Balkan countries within the European Research Area. Work in the Council will focus mainly on the accession of third countries to the Horizon Europe programme and on the preparation of the Council's response to the Commission's proposal for a **Global Approach to Research and Innovation**.

The **European Research Area (ERA)** is the framework for all research and innovation activities in

Europe. The Slovenian Presidency wishes to establish a new, inclusive ERA governance framework, focusing on directing investments and addressing interdisciplinary and global challenges, including through the promotion of new approaches such as **Horizon Europe Missions** and the **New European Bauhaus movement**. Through the events, special attention will be devoted to **research infrastructure, the involvement of young researchers, synergies between research and education and research ethics**. It is planned that the Council of the European Union will adopt the **Pact for Research and Innovation**, while new governance through the **ERA Forum** will strengthen the implementation of common goals both at EU and national level. In the European Research Area, special attention will be devoted to efforts to ensure **gender equality**.

As part of the goal of raising awareness about the importance of investing in the **space sector** to achieve sustainable development, the Slovenian

Presidency will emphasise the needs of SMEs and stimulate discussion on their involvement in space technology development and conditions for easier entry of new actors. It will promote the use of space infrastructure in policy areas such as agriculture, environment, water management, forestry, migration, telecommunications, and natural disaster response. Emphasis will also be placed on protecting against cyberattacks and promoting the development of cybersecurity. The EU's main cross-cutting challenge in space is to achieve greater autonomy for the sector, including spacecraft launching capabilities. Space traffic management (STM) is one of the most important issues and is aimed at creating a coordinated approach at EU level and a general framework for space transport management (both in technical and operational terms). This will promote the EU's interests in sustainable development, safety and protection of investments in the space sector and secure connectivity.

HEALTH, EMPLOYMENT AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Health

Joint efforts to find solutions in the field of health policy have made possible a more effective and efficient response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, the pandemic also highlighted weaknesses in health systems when responding to sudden systemic shocks. The activities of the Slovenian Presidency will therefore focus on strengthening the EU's effective response to health threats, exit strategies and possible future pandemics. We will put focus on the added value of cooperation at EU level **in the development and implementation of innovative solutions for resilient health systems**, with the aim of collectively investing more effectively in improving the organisation, accessibility, quality and responsiveness of health systems and their sustainable financing. Special attention will also be paid to the **role of the EU in global health** and the **European Cancer Plan**, which is one of the three pillars of the new **European Health Union**.

The consequences of COVID-19 have shown that better cooperation and effective response to crises and health emergencies require more cooperation and mutual coordination, as well as clearly defined tasks and competencies at both national and EU level. The Slovenian Presidency will therefore place particular emphasis on crisis preparedness and establishing response mechanisms, which is part of the European Health Union and strengthens the role of key EU health agencies (the **European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control (ECDC)** and the **European Medicines Agency (EMA)**), while improving the legal framework for **serious cross-border health threats**.

The Slovenian Presidency will start with the discussion on a legislative proposal to establish a new Health Emergency Response Authority (**HERA**), a structure aimed at achieving a better EU response to cross-border threats. In conjunction with the European Medicines Strategy, HERA could be key in terms of coordinating between different stakehold-

ers, investing and developing support segments.

In the area of **availability and accessibility of medicines**, the COVID-19 pandemic has further demonstrated the sensitivity of the supply of medicines and the importance of ensuring the EU's open strategic autonomy. At the same time, this is an opportunity for common solutions at EU level. The Slovenian Presidency therefore wishes to stimulate discussion on new solutions at EU level, which have the potential to improve the accessibility or availability of medicines. At the same time, we would like to address the issue of shortages of those medicines where there is a lack of business interest, as is happening in the field of antimicrobials and in the case of generic or older drugs for oncology treatments when it comes to changing the purpose of drug use. In this way, the Slovenian Presidency will contribute to strengthening the European Health Union and implementing the **European Medicines Strategy**.

Employment, social affairs and equal opportunities

Europe is facing an aging population, digitalisation and transition to a climate-neutral economy, which has a significant impact on labour markets, social protection systems and the daily lives of every generation. The recent crisis has highlighted a number of challenges.

The European Pillar of Social Rights and the action plan for its implementation is a central guideline for the EU and its Member States in their work to improve working and living conditions across the EU. This is relevant not only in relation to recovery efforts but above all in finding long-term sustainable solutions to adapt to the changes associated with the digital and green transition and an aging population.

The Slovenian Presidency will continue the discussion on strengthening social Europe, focusing on the implementation of the commitments agreed at the social summit in May 2021 in Porto, including

implementation of plans for recovery and resilience in the social field.

We will pay special attention to the effects of demographic changes on the labour markets and their successful management. The central guideline will be a lifelong approach to aging, with an emphasis on **promoting quality work for a quality life** for all generations, on which the Slovenian Presidency will prepare **Council conclusions**. In particular, the conclusions will respond to the Communication on a New Strategic Framework for Safety and Health at Work, the updated Skills Agenda, the Gender Equality Strategy, the EU Strategy on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and the findings of the public consultation on the Green Paper on Aging. A lifelong approach to aging will also lead to **discussions on the rights of children and the elderly** organised by the Presidency.

The Slovenian Presidency will give priority to the proposal of the **minimum pay** framework with the aim of improving the working and living conditions of workers and the protection of employers who pay decent wages, while seeking the widest possible support for the proposal for a Directive.

The Slovenian Presidency will continue negotiations on the **wage transparency initiative**, which aims to eliminate gender discrimination, reduce the gender pay gap and promote women's participation in the labour market. With the aim of strengthening gender equality in the world of work, the Slovenian Presidency will also prepare **Council conclusions on the impact of digitalisation and artificial intelligence on gender equality in the labour market**.

Ensuring equal treatment of mobile workers and their families is one of the EU's most important achievements and also forms the basis for the functioning of the EU's internal market. The Slovenian Presidency will continue negotiations on the **coordination of social security systems** and try to find an agreement with the European Parliament, with a view to helping consolidate the social security rights of mobile workers in the EU.

The Slovenian Presidency will also pay attention to the **Western Balkan partners** moving closer towards the principles of social Europe, with special emphasis on youth employment.

AGRICULTURE AND FISHERIES

Considering the general commitment to the implementation of a **climate neutral, green, fair and social Europe**, the Slovenian Presidency will continue to promote sustainable food chains, agriculture and fisheries. Particular focus will be on guaranteeing food supply and the integrity of food supply chains in times of crisis, animal welfare and plant health. In forestry, the emphasis will be placed on sustainable and multi-purpose forest management, especially in light of the contribution of forests to the achievement of the EU's climate and environmental goals by 2050 and to rural development.

In the context of the **European Green Deal**, debate will continue on promoting the transition of agriculture and the entire food chain, including the fisheries sector, to more sustainable production and processing practices. What is crucial here is ensuring a socially sustainable transition that takes the specific characteristics of the agricultural sector into account and maintains the competitiveness of the entire food chain. Given the special importance of organic farming in achieving the goals of the Green Deal and the Farm to Fork Strategy, the Slovenian Presidency will aim to adopt Council conclusions on this topic.

In the light of the planned activities as part of the **Farm to Fork Strategy**, the Slovenian Presidency will also support discussions in the areas that touch on the processing of food, the position of farmers in food chains, transport, the sale of foodstuffs and consumer attitudes towards healthy food. Particularly important at an international level will be the **global United Nations Food Systems Summit**, which will address the importance of the transformation of food security systems, the mode of production, the processing and the consumption of food.

The **reform of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP)**, which aims to increase the environmental and climate change ambitions of the CAP, will be the main tool for achieving the objectives of the Farm to Fork Strategy. Closing this dossier will be a political priority for the Slovenian Presidency. Since quality

and comparable statistics will be crucial for monitoring the implementation of the reformed Common Agricultural Policy, the Slovenian Presidency will also work towards closing two dossiers on agricultural statistics.

As part of the fundamental priority to build a stronger and **more resilient EU**, the area of food supply will also be included in improvements to the EU's crisis management system. The strategic role of agriculture, a better exchange of information, and coordinated action to ensure food supply security in times of crisis will be the themes of the **debate on the European Commission's Communication on the contingency plan to ensure food supply and food security**.

Improving the competitiveness and income of farmers in the food supply chain is key to a fair distribution of added value among stakeholders. The Slovenian Presidency will monitor the transposition into national legislations of the Directive on unfair trading practices in the agricultural and food supply chain.

The Slovenian Presidency will also focus on the discussion on the challenges to the development of rural areas, such as digitalisation, demographic challenges, the role of women in rural areas, and the strengthening of dialogue between urban and rural areas. The latter will be the focus of the informal meeting of the Council of the European Union on Agriculture and Fisheries.

An important priority for the Slovenian Presidency's work on **food** will be **origin labelling**, in response to changing consumer expectations. Efforts will be focused mainly on progress in the preparation of changes to the labelling of honey blends.

On **plant health**, the Slovenian Presidency will continue the discussion on measures to address the occurrence and **prevention of the introduction of dangerous plant diseases and pests**, as well as current issues in plant health. **Healthy plants** contribute to achieving the objectives in the area of food

supply, forest management, biodiversity and environmental conservation. The Slovenian Presidency will coordinate the positions of the Member States and the Commission regarding the fulfilment of phytosanitary requirements for plants and plant products in the negotiations **on trade agreements with third countries**. Coordinating and representing EU positions will also be a priority for the Presidency when it comes to the development and adoption of international standards in this area.

The priority issues in **animal health** will be aspects of biosafety in connection with measures to prevent the introduction and spread of animal diseases. The Slovenian Presidency will steer the discussion **on animal welfare** on the basis of a report on the evaluation of legislation in animal welfare and current issues in this field.

The Presidency will also lead the discussion on **digitalisation in the veterinary sector**. The purpose of this discussion is to raise awareness of the possibilities offered by new information technology in terms of using data collected in each area of veterinary medicine and food safety to improve risk analysis and optimise official supervision.

Forestry makes a significant contribution to realising objectives in agriculture, the environment and climate. In the context of forestry and forest-related EU policies, the Slovenian Presidency will strive to strengthen the role of forests and forestry in pre-

serving and developing rural areas and promoting a circular economy, replacing fossil and energy-intensive materials with wood, and to advocate multifunctional and sustainable forest management, including in the context of forest biodiversity preservation. The new Commission legislative act will continue to combat illegal logging and related trade and the deforestation and degradation of the world's forests. **Particular attention will be paid to the new EU Forest Strategy after 2020.**

On **fisheries**, the Slovenian Presidency will work towards the greatest possible progress in the negotiations on the **Regulation amending the Regulation as regards fisheries control**. The revised Regulation will update the common rules for the control system, inspections and enforcement of the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy (CFP) by national authorities. **The Slovenian Presidency will also lead negotiations on fishing opportunities in 2022** for the North Sea and the Baltic, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, the Atlantic and deep-sea stocks, and negotiations with the United Kingdom and Norway. Negotiations will be launched to extend the access regime under the basic Regulation of the Common Fisheries Policy. **In the field of multilateral and bilateral cooperation with coastal third countries and Sustainable Fisheries Partnership Agreements**, the focus will be on agreements with Iceland, Greenland and other countries.

EDUCATION, YOUTH, CULTURE AND SPORT

Education

Education for the future includes knowing how to anticipate upcoming changes, so as a contribution to this, a **discussion on new ways of learning and teaching**, placing digital transformation at the forefront, will take place during the Slovenian Presidency. Based on the experience gained during the COVID-19 epidemic, we will focus on **new knowledge, competencies and skills** in a changing society and on innovative learning and study environments and the digital competencies of educators, teachers and professionals in educational institutions. We will also focus on the broader context of the **development of digitalisation and artificial intelligence and ethics in educational processes** and thus contribute to the implementation of the Digital Education Action Plan. The **Council Recommendation on Blended Learning for High-Quality and Inclusive Primary and Secondary Education** will address the need for primary and secondary education to increase inclusion and the adaptability of the education system and improve the broader development of competencies of all pupils and students.

As part of the implementation of the **Plan for the Transformation of Higher Education**, we will promote cooperation between higher education and science and the joint contribution to the creation of the new vision of knowledge at the meeting point of the European Education Area and the European Research Area. In this context, we will also contribute to the further **development of the European Universities Initiative**.

We will also devote our efforts to **the renewal of the European Agenda for Adult Learning** and in this context continue the processes under the renewed Programme of Knowledge and Skills relating to adults in the **lifelong learning** context. The aim will be to create integrated, high-quality and inclusive adult education systems for all, including older people, and especially for those most in need of access to learning, including distance learning and on-

line learning. An important horizontal aspect in the reform of the Agenda for Adult Learning will be the achievement of sustainable goals.

We will strive to reach an **inclusive agreement on the management of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training**, including in terms of linking the European Education Area with the European Research Area. We will stimulate discussions on **education for sustainable development, micro-qualifications, individual learning accounts** and access to vocational education and training and lifelong learning.

Youth

The central theme of the Slovenian Presidency regarding **youth** matters will be the **participation of young people, with an emphasis on the inclusion of young people in various social and civic spaces**. The Slovenian Presidency will also prepare a response to the **Commission's report on the implementation of the EU Youth Strategy** with a proposed vision for the development of this area, which will be summarised in a **new three-year work plan for implementing this Strategy**. We will devote special attention to the **implementation of the EU Youth Dialogue and volunteer mobility, as well as cross-border solidarity**.

Culture

In the cultural field, the Slovenian Presidency will address a wide range of creativity, cultural rights and heritage matters, which represent the central starting point for work on sustainable solutions and an EU development breakthrough. This will transfer support for a green and digital future to the cultural field. We will prioritise the innovative potential of culture with special emphasis on **quality living** in an environment where architectural solutions are based on tradition and supported by modern technology, in line with the initiative of the **New European Bauhaus**.

Taking into account cross-cutting solutions for digital services and cultural diversity as an added European value, the Slovenian Presidency will pay special attention to measures to promote the competitiveness of European audio-visual and media contents.

Sport

The Slovenian Presidency intends to prepare a Council Resolution on the **European model of sport**, with the aim of highlighting the special nature of sport, European values in sport and the common features of organised sport in the EU. There will also be a focus on the impact of closed sports competitions on the organised sport system. Following

the example of the already established concept of lifelong learning, the Slovenian Presidency will work to establish and implement the concept of **lifelong physical activity**, so Council conclusions on this topic are planned.

The Slovenian Presidency, together with the Member States and the European Commission, will examine the possibilities of revising the 2019 **WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency)** Resolution in the light of possible changes to the representation of the EU in the WADA Founding Committee and the coordination of EU positions before WADA meetings.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

Foreign affairs

In accordance with its prerogatives, the Slovenian Presidency will support the work of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. It will actively address current developments around the world, with a special emphasis on unified and concrete global action by the EU, strengthening the resilience of the EU, its countries and societies, and strengthening the EU's strategic autonomy and its cooperation with key partners, in particular the United States.

Strengthening the global order based on effective multilateralism, international law and human rights is in the interests of the EU and its Member States. Strong transatlantic cooperation is crucial in enhancing multilateralism, relations with other global actors and tackling current challenges, including climate change, in preparation for a successful COP26.

During the Presidency, Slovenia will include the transatlantic aspect in as many topics as possible. The implementation of the Declaration adopted at the EU-US Summit in June this year will be particularly important.

In the discussion on the Strategic Compass, designed to direct all defence and security initiatives in order to effectively achieve the goals of the EU Global Strategy, Slovenia has made proposals to upgrade partnerships, emphasising the importance of complementarity with NATO. Special attention will be devoted to the Western Balkans, where the US remains a key ally of the EU in promoting democracy, the rule of law and human rights, with the ultimate goal of integrating the countries of the region into the EU.

Strengthening the European perspective and sustainable development of the Western Balkans will be a central task during the Slovenian Presidency. The aim is to continue the enlargement process with a key emphasis on the rule of law and socio-economic development, strengthening sectoral inte-

gration, while addressing open issues in the region and responding to common threats. Our work in this area will be based on a new instrument for financing external action for the countries of the Western Balkans and on other relevant Commission documents. The Slovenian Presidency, which will organise the EU-Western Balkans Summit, will promote an ambitious and proactive policy for the EU and the region with a special focus on involving countries of the region in CSDP activities to strengthen dialogue and build their capacities and resilience. It is vital to continue sound cooperation in research and innovation and to strengthen dialogue and concrete initiatives and programmes in the field of youth and education. Attention will be paid to controlling the COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences in both health and other areas. Cybersecurity will be an important field of cooperation.

The Slovenian Presidency will also give due consideration to the developments in the EU's neighbourhood. In the light of the EU-Eastern Partnership Summit, it will work towards the adoption of priorities for cooperation in the medium term. The Slovenian Presidency will also be active in strengthening the EU's relations with other key global actors; if such decision is reached, it is possible that two summits with China will take place, both in the EU27 format and with EU leaders.

It will also take an active part in drafting a new strategic agreement between the EU and the African Union, to be discussed at the EU-AU Ministerial meeting.

Culture and creativity are important drivers of sustainable development and intercultural understanding in the EU's external relations. In this context, the Slovenian Presidency will do its utmost to make progress in the implementation of the 2016 EU Strategy for International Cooperation in Culture.

Under the new Pact on Migration and Asylum issued by the European Commission in September 2020, the comprehensive approach will give due regard to the external aspects of migration and asylum policy.

Defence

The Slovenian Presidency will work towards strengthening the EU's capacity to respond more appropriately and decisively to crises that have a direct impact on its interests and security. It will strive to develop political and strategic guidelines for the realisation of ambitions; an important role of the Strategic Compass process will be to connect the strategic level with the operational level of materializing ambitions. It will strive for common activities in the areas of capacity building, crisis management, military mobility, hybrid threats, cyber security and the strengthening of partnerships.

In the light of the experience gained during the COVID-19 pandemic, attention will be paid to exploring ways to improve cooperation, including within EU-NATO relations, in the area of military assistance to civilian authorities and the implementation of measures to improve resilience in civil preparedness and as well as in the field of civil-military cooperation in crises. The Slovenian Presidency will attach special importance to EU-NATO cooperation, especially in combating hybrid threats, cybersecurity, military mobility and interoperability, and will advocate the institutionalisation of contacts between the two organisations.

Activities in the area of the Common Security and Defence Policy will focus on the Western Balkans, where key topics will be maintaining the CSDP presence in the region, supporting cooperation and the capacity building of Western Balkan countries in order to enable participation in CSDP mechanisms, including operations and missions, and supporting the building of resilience to hybrid threats.

In the light of the green transition, the Slovenian Presidency will give priority to the topic of energy efficiency in the defence system and prepare a comprehensive set of activities within the defence system, which will address the issue of energy efficiency at European level.

Foreign trade

Trade policy is a critical element of a comprehensive economic policy response to the crisis. The Slovenian Presidency will work to strengthen the EU's global competitiveness while ensuring open, fair and rule-based international trade with a special focus on SMEs and sustainable development. It will follow the guidelines outlined in the **new trade strategy**.

In the context of the **World Trade Organisation (WTO)**, the Presidency will continue the EU's efforts to strengthen the rule-based multilateral trading system and reform the organisation towards greater importance, efficiency and responsiveness to modern challenges. It will work towards a successful **12th WTO Ministerial Conference (MC12)**, which will take place from 30 November to 3 December 2021. The focus will be on efforts to agree on WTO reform, including the role of the appellate body in the dispute settlement mechanism. In the context of the ongoing multilateral negotiations, the Presidency will pay special attention to the agreement on fisheries subsidies. In plurilateral initiatives, it will support progress in e-commerce and domestic service legislation, trade facilitation for micro, small and medium-sized enterprises, and investment facilitation for development. We will also prioritise initiatives in the areas of health, environmental sustainability and gender equality.

The Slovenian Presidency will continue to address the most important **bilateral, regional and horizontal dossiers** in trade and investment policy and strive to strengthen cooperation with like-minded partners. Priority will be given to strengthening the partnership with the **United States** and establishing a fairer, rule-based economic relationship with **China**. Efforts will be made to diversify relations and make alliances, including a wide network of trade agreements. The Slovenian Presidency will thus monitor the implementation of existing agreements and work towards progress in the process of signing the agreement with **Mexico** and **Mercosur**. It will monitor the ongoing negotiations focusing on **Australia and New Zealand** and updating the agreement with **Chile**, and work to deepen cooperation

with **India** and the African continent and African countries. It will advocate progress in the context of a **comprehensive EU investment agenda**, working to ensure that modern investment agreements are based on compliance with the Paris Climate Agreement, International Labour Organization standards and multilateral investment law reforms, especially those relating to small and medium-sized enterprises.

In the context of **legislative dossiers**, the Slovenian Presidency will strive for progress in addressing the **international public procurement instrument**. It will launch deliberations on a new proposal on the **generalised scheme of preferences** and **the anti-coercion instrument**. It will respond constructively to potential new challenges and seek **synergies with other EU policies**, in particular in the area of the **green and digital transformation** and the building of a **more resilient Europe**.

Development and humanitarian aid

Through development cooperation, the Slovenian Presidency will continue to strengthen the Union's efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to ensure a sustainable and green recovery after the pandemic. Slovenia will work towards implementing the commitments of the Paris Climate Agreement and the European Green Deal.

Water will be a central thematic priority of EU external action in the field of development and humanitarian activities. The Slovenian Presidency will advocate a **comprehensive approach to water**. Special attention will be paid to the development and humanitarian aspects of the consequences of the pandemic, with an emphasis on global health, food and nutrition supply and security, and gender equality. Investing in human development, including through education, and eliminating all forms of inequality further exacerbated by the pandemic is the best way to strengthen social resilience. Additional attention will be paid to various development aspects of the consequences of the pandemic under the new EU Neighbourhood, Development and International Cooperation Instrument (NDICI) and through the common approach of Team Europe. The Slovenian Presidency will strive to complete the internal EU procedures for the signing and provisional application of a new comprehensive agreement between the EU and the countries of Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific as soon as possible. While regularly responding to current and lasting humanitarian crises, attention will also be paid to finding innovative solutions, including digitalisation, for more efficient and effective humanitarian action.

